



Questions and Answers about Gray Wolf Recovery in North America

1) What is the historical range of the gray wolf in the contiguous United States?

Before the arrival of European settlers, two species of wolves lived in North America - - ranging from coast to coast and from Canada into Mexico. The gray wolf lived throughout most of the United States, with the exception of parts of the mid-Atlantic and Southeast, as well as Canada and the northern half of Mexico. The red wolf lived only in the mid-Atlantic and southeastern United States.

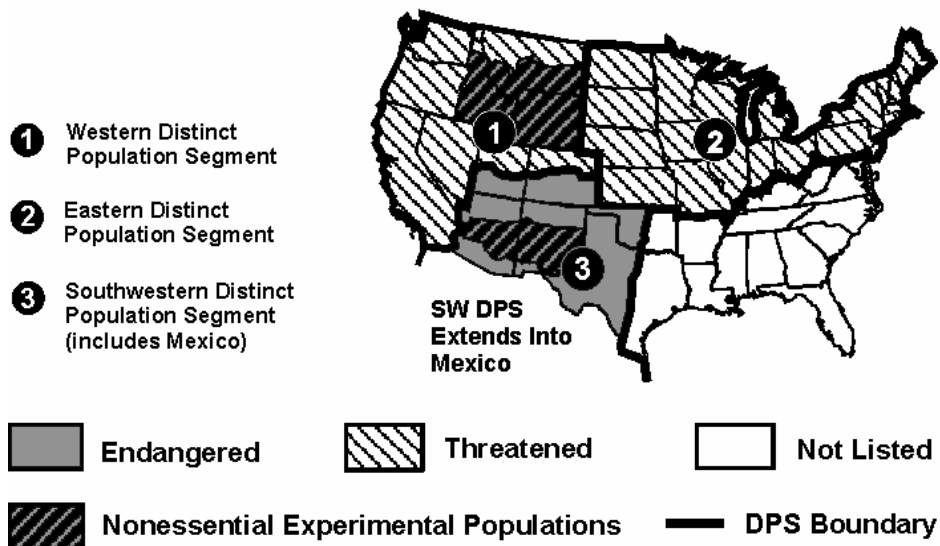
2) Where are gray wolves now found in the United States?

Within the contiguous 48 states, gray wolves are now found in three separate areas that are isolated from each other: the Midwest, West, and Southwest. Naturally occurring, wild gray wolf populations are found in the Great Lakes states of Michigan, Wisconsin, and Minnesota, and also in northwestern Montana. Additionally, there are three reintroduced experimental populations: one in central Idaho, a second in the Greater Yellowstone National Park area, and a third in New Mexico and Arizona. The Service reintroduced wolves into areas with the greatest potential to sustain wild wolves. Because of high human population densities and development in other areas, particularly in the East, many states that historically supported wolves are no longer suitable for wolf recovery.

3) What is the current Federal designation for gray wolves in the United States?

In 2003, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service designated the three geographical areas where wild gray wolves occur as Gray Wolf Distinct Population Segments (DPS). These Distinct Population Segments are the Eastern, Western, and Southwestern. Wolves in the Eastern and Western DPSs were reclassified from endangered to threatened. The status of wolves in the Southwestern DPS remains endangered. The nonessential experimental population areas that existed before the DPSs were designated remain in existence and are found within the Western and Southwestern DPSs. **Note:** please see the "Glossary" for definitions of "Distinct Population Segment" and "non-essential experimental population area."

Status of the Gray Wolf in the Continental U.S.



4) How many wild gray wolves are there in the United States?

Eastern Gray Wolf Distinct Population Segment

Michigan - Upper Peninsula	360 (late winter of 2003-2004)
- Isle Royale	29 (late winter of 2003-2004)
Minnesota	2450 (1998 estimate*)
Wisconsin	373 (late winter of 2003-2004)

**Minnesota does not conduct an annual survey, but is conducting a survey to estimate the 2003-2004 winter population size.

Western Gray Wolf Distinct Population Segment (current as of December 2003)

Northern Rocky Mountain Gray Wolf - natural recovery	
Northwest Montana	92 (4 breeding packs)
Northern Rocky Mountain Gray Wolf - Experimental Populations	
Central Idaho	368 (26 breeding packs)
Yellowstone ecosystem	301 (21 breeding packs)
(Idaho/Wyoming/Montana)	

Southwestern Gray Wolf Distinct Population Segment (current as of February 2004)

Mexican Gray Wolf - Experimental Population	
Arizona & New Mexico	35 to 40 + unknown number of pups

Alaska (not protected by ESA)	6,000-8,000
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5) How are population estimates made for wolves?

Biologists monitor wolves and make population estimates using a combination of techniques. The primary methods are radio-telemetry, surveys for sign (tracks, scat, and snow urinations), and incidental observations. With radio telemetry, biologists attach a radio-signal transmitting collar to at least one wolf in a pack. That wolf is subsequently located from an airplane, a ground station, or a satellite; once located, the numbers of wolves that are traveling with it are counted, and the pack's territory can be accurately mapped.

Because of the expense, it is not feasible to radio-collar a wolf in every pack, so population trend surveys are also conducted. Trend surveys are based on ground and aerial tracking for sign in snow; counting visits to scent stations; counting packs by simulating howling to get a response; interviewing hunters, trappers, and resource professionals; and studying and mapping trends in livestock depredations.

6) What is the Service's goal for gray wolf management in the contiguous 48 States?

The Service's goal, and the goal of the Endangered Species Act (ESA), is to recover the gray wolf. *Recovery* means to increase a species' numbers and distribution and decrease threats to the extent that a viable population is ensured for the foreseeable future. Then ESA protection is no longer necessary.

Recovery criteria for ensuring viable populations into the foreseeable future are identified in gray wolf recovery plans. Those criteria are listed below.

' Eastern Gray Wolf Distinct Population Segment

- C The Minnesota population must be stable or growing and its continued survival assured.
- C A second population outside of Minnesota and Isle Royale must be re-established, having at least 100 wolves in late winter if located within 100 miles of the Minnesota wolf population or having at least 200 wolves if located beyond that distance. A Wisconsin-Michigan population of 100 wolves is considered viable because continued immigration of Minnesota wolves will supplement it demographically and genetically for the foreseeable future.
- C Maintain the above-mentioned population levels (in the population outside of Minnesota) for five consecutive years (that is, for six annual wolf surveys).

' Western Gray Wolf Distinct Population Segment

- C Thirty breeding pairs distributed throughout Montana, Idaho, and Wyoming for three successive years.
- C Recovery has been focused in northwestern Montana, central Idaho, and Wyoming (the Greater Yellowstone ecosystem).

' Southwestern Gray Wolf Distinct Population Segment

- C The preliminary recovery objective is to maintain the captive breeding program while establishing a self-sustaining wild population of at least 100 animals in the species' historical range. This recovery objective is currently under review.

7) Is gray wolf reintroduction a likely possibility for the northeastern United States?

The New England states and New York are included in the Gray Wolf Eastern Distinct Population Segment and the recovery criteria for the Eastern DPS remain the same as identified in the 1992 Recovery Plan, as described in the answer to the previous question. Gray wolf reintroduction to the Northeast is not necessary for recovery of the Eastern DPS. However, the 1992 Recovery Plan for the eastern gray wolf did identify the Adirondack Park in upstate New York and areas in Maine and adjacent New Hampshire as "areas with re-establishment possibilities." Several private conservation organizations are investigating the biological potential and societal acceptance of restoring wolves to New York and Maine. However, after Federal delisting, northeastern reintroductions would have to be done under legal authorities other than the Endangered Species Act

8) How were gray wolf recovery plans and criteria developed?

Recovery teams, composed of wolf experts or representatives of agencies managing wolf habitat, prepared the recovery plans and developed recovery objectives and criteria. The recovery teams considered many factors including: their personal knowledge of the species, the amount of habitat available, the quality of the habitat, whether populations are isolated, data on the population dynamics of the species, data on minimum viable population size, and the comments made by other scientists during peer review. Using this information, the team recommended criteria that, when reached, would indicate that the species is healthy enough to be reclassified from endangered to threatened. They also recommended recovery criteria that would indicate when protections of the ESA would no longer be needed.

These recommendations were incorporated into a draft recovery plan that had input from stakeholders and was the subject of a public comment period. After analyzing public and stakeholder comments and making revisions, a final recovery plan was published that outlined recovery criteria. The wolf recovery criteria focus on numbers of wolves, numbers of populations, distribution of populations, and the likelihood of adequate future management.

9) Have the recovery criteria been met?

The recovery criteria have been met in the Eastern and Western DPSs, but not in the Southwestern DPS.

Eastern DPS

All numerical recovery criteria for the Eastern Gray Wolf Distinct Population Segment, as identified in the 1992 Recovery Plan, have been met. The Service then reviewed the status of wolves in the DPS and has now proposed to delist the Eastern Gray Wolf DPS. If this DPS is delisted, those wolves would no longer receive the protection of the ESA, but would be protected by the states and tribes in the areas where they live.

Western DPS

The 1987 recovery plan recommended that 10 pairs of wolves in three separate recovery areas in Montana, Idaho and Wyoming for three successive years would represent a viable wolf population that no longer needed ESA protection. Subsequently, more detailed evaluations and extensive peer review indicated that a viable wolf population was better defined as 30 pairs of wolves that had successfully raised pups and were equitably distributed throughout the mountainous portions of Montana, Idaho, and Wyoming for three successive years. At the close of 2003, 51 breeding pairs – a total of 761 wolves – existed in the Western DPS. That represented the fourth year the number of wolves were at or above 30 breeding pairs, and achieved the numerical and distribution recovery criteria for wolves in the Western DPS.

Southwestern DPS

The Southwestern gray wolf recovery program is relatively young. Preliminary objectives for reclassification have been identified and when that point is reached, the Recovery Plan will be updated and delisting objectives developed.

The Southwestern recovery program centers on captive breeding and subsequent reintroductions. The captive breeding program includes 39 breeding facilities in the United States and Mexico that contribute wolves for reintroductions. The first reintroduction was in January 1998 when 13 wolves were transferred to remote sites in Apache National Forest. After undergoing acclimation in large enclosures for several weeks, the wolves were released in late March 1998, to disperse in a 7,000-square-mile recovery area. That area includes the Apache and Gila National Forests in Arizona and New Mexico.

About 800,000 acres of the Gila National Forest in New Mexico, primarily within the Gila Wilderness, have no active cattle grazing allotments, are roadless, uninhabited, and have good elk populations. Through coordination with the U.S. Forest Service and the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish, four sites within the Gila Wilderness have been identified as potential relocation sites for recaptured Mexican wolves. Two packs, the Mule and the Pipestem, have been translocated into New Mexico. To date, approximately 80 Mexican wolves have been released into the wild, and there are now 35 to 40 free-ranging. Additional releases are planned to reach the goal of a wild population of 100 wolves. In early 2002 we signed an agreement with the White Mountain Apache Tribe to reestablish wolves on their 1.6 million-acre reservation. On June 4, 2003 an alpha pair and their pups were released on that reservation.

10) Why didn't the Service delist the Gray Wolf Eastern and Western DPSs as soon as the recovery criteria were met?

The criteria spelled out in the recovery plans are used as a yardstick to measure whether the species is no longer endangered or threatened. But those criteria are not the only yardstick. The ESA identifies five factors that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service must consider to determine if delisting is appropriate:

1. Threats to, or actual destruction of, the habitat needed by the species;
2. Threats from the over-use of the species for commercial, recreational, scientific, or educational purposes;
3. Threats from disease or predation;
4. The amount of protection provided to the species or its habitat by other laws and regulations; and
5. Any other natural or manmade factors affecting the continued existence of the species.

Achievement of the recovery plan's criteria triggers the Service to formally re-evaluate the species in terms of these five factors. This evaluation includes an assessment of whether those factors are likely to increase and re-endanger the wolf if it is delisted. Because the States and Tribes will be responsible for gray wolf management after a DPS is delisted, the Service uses State and Tribal management plans as the basis for the analysis of future threats.

The Service has proposed delisting the Eastern DPS because the recovery criteria have been met and because the Minnesota, Michigan, and Wisconsin management plans will ensure a viable population of gray wolves in those states for the foreseeable future. In 2000, we proposed reclassification to threatened status, rather than delisting, because Minnesota did not yet have a wolf management plan in place. The lack of a State management plan made it impossible for us to evaluate the threats that would be faced by Minnesota wolves if we were to delist them at that time.

The Service has not proposed delisting the Western DPS. The Service believes that for gray wolves to survive into the future in the northern Rockies, they must be managed to maintain a population size and distribution above the recovery criteria. Although Idaho and Montana have developed gray wolf management plans that would meet those criteria, Wyoming has not. The Service's evaluation of the Idaho, Montana, and Wyoming wolf management plans included peer review by 11 national wolf experts and State responses to those peer review comments.

11) What is the process for delisting the wolf?

Species are delisted through a Federal rulemaking process, similar to the process used to list species as threatened or endangered. That process promotes public involvement and provides an explanation of the decision when it is announced. There are four steps to this rule-making process:

1. The Service publishes a delisting proposal in the *Federal Register* which describes the proposed change and the rationale behind it. This proposal is publicized to ensure that interested individuals and organizations are aware of it.
2. After the proposal is published, a public comment period of at least 60 days follows. During that time any interested party may provide data or other comments relevant to the proposed action. If requested, the Service will hold one or more public hearings to receive oral comments. It is the policy of the Service to solicit the expert opinion of independent specialists regarding the scientific or commercial data in proposed ESA rulemakings, including delistings.

3. After the public comment period closes, the Service reviews all new data and comments that were received during the comment period and reconsiders the proposed action. Alternate actions or modifications of the proposal are also considered.
4. A final decision is published in the *Federal Register*, announcing the effective date of the action. In some cases the proposed action may be withdrawn or modified.

A proposed rule to delist the gray wolf Eastern Distinct Population Segment was published on **xxxxxx** with a 120-day public comment period following.

12) How may I comment on the proposal to delist the gray wolf Eastern DPS?

Public comments will be accepted for **120 days after the proposed rule is published**. You may fax, e:mail, or mail your written comments to:

FAX number: (801)517-1015

E:mail address: egwdelist@fs.fed.us

Mailing address: Gray Wolf Delist – Eastern Distinct Population Segment, c/o Content Analysis Team, P.O. Box 221150, Salt Lake City, Utah 84122-1150

Or by following the instructions on the Federal eRulemaking Portal: <http://www.regulations.gov>

Also, we will schedule several public hearings to provide the public with an opportunity to voice their comments. The dates, times, and locations of those hearings will be publicized when they are determined.

13) How can I find out more about the proposal to delist the Eastern DPS?

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service posts information about gray wolf populations on the Internet at <http://midwest.fws.gov/wolf>. Individuals or groups wishing to be placed on the Service's mailing list to obtain updates on the wolf's status can write to:

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Gray Wolf Review
1 Federal Drive
Fort Snelling, MN 55111-4056

or use the GRAYWOLFMAIL@FWS.GOV address or call the Service's Gray Wolf Information Line at 612-713-7337. This phone line is for information requests only; comments on the proposal made by phone will not be accepted.

In the event that our internet connection is not functional, please request additional information by the alternate methods mentioned above.

14) How can I find out more about gray wolves and recovery activities in the Western and Southwestern DPSs?

Information about the Gray Wolf Western DPS is on the Service's Website at <http://westerngraywolf.fws.gov/> or you may write to:

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Western Gray Wolf Recovery Coordinator
100 N. Park, #320, Helena,
Montana 59601

or use the WesternGrayWolf@fws.gov address.

Information about the Gray Wolf Southwestern DPS is on the Service's Website at <http://mexicanwolf.fws.gov/> or you may write to :

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Gray Wolf Recovery Program
P.O. Box 856
Alpine, AZ 85920

or use the fw2eswol@fws.gov address or call (505) 248-6652 or (928) 367-4281.

GLOSSARY

Delisting: Delisting is taking a species off the list of threatened and endangered species when the population has recovered. Delisting is a formal rulemaking process that requires publication of a proposal to delist in the *Federal Register*, followed by a public comment period. The information received during the public comment period is reviewed, a decision is made whether to delist, and the decision is published in the *Federal Register*. Species are also delisted if they become extinct or were originally listed in error.

Distinct Population Segment: In addition to the listing and delisting of species and subspecies, the ESA allows the listing/delisting of Distinct Population Segments of vertebrate species (i.e., animals with backbones: mammals, birds, fish, reptiles, and amphibians). A Distinct Population Segment is a portion of a species' or subspecies' population or range. The Distinct Population Segment is generally described geographically, such as "all members of XYZ species that occur north of 40° north latitude." (For more information on Distinct Population Segments, see the fact sheet entitled *Little-Known But Important Features of the Endangered Species Act*.)

Endangered: Any species, subspecies, or Distinct Population Segment which is in danger of extinction throughout all or a significant portion of its range.

Non-Essential Experimental Population: A reintroduced population believed not to be essential for the survival of the species, but important for its full recovery and eventual removal from the endangered and threatened list. These populations are treated as "threatened" species, except that the ESA's section 7 consultation regulations that require Federal agencies to consult with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to reduce adverse impacts from Federal actions do not apply, except where the species occurs within National Parks or National Wildlife Refuges. Also, critical habitat cannot be designated in these areas. (For more information on Experimental Populations, see the fact sheet entitled *Little-Known But Important Features of the Endangered Species Act*.)

Reclassification: Reclassification is a process of changing the status of a listed species from endangered to threatened or vice versa. It is a formal rulemaking process that requires that a proposal to reclassify be published in the *Federal Register* followed by a public comment period. Information received during the public comment period is then evaluated and a determination on whether to reclassify is made and published.

Recovery: Recovery is the goal of the Endangered Species Act. Recovery is a process of management and protection of a species so that its population(s) can increase and expand and/or the factors threatening it have been significantly reduced. When a species has been "recovered" it means the species' population is strong enough that protection under the Endangered Species Act is no longer needed. Achieving recovery usually does not require the species to be restored across its historical range.

Threatened: Any species, subspecies, or Distinct Population Segment which is likely to become endangered within the foreseeable future throughout all or a significant portion of its range. The Endangered Species Act recognizes that “threatened” species may not need all the protections that “endangered” species do. Therefore, special rules can be developed for threatened species which allow greater flexibility in management, as long as the increased flexibility will promote the conservation of the species. It is such a special rules that spell out the conditions under which Midwestern wolves preying on domestic animals may be controlled.

Viable Population: Viable means that the population will continue to reproduce and maintain itself over time (i.e., the number of immigrants and young produced equals or exceeds the number that emigrate or die). A viable population must be sufficiently large to prevent genetic problems. The population must also be large enough and distributed across a large enough area that catastrophic events such as disease or severe weather will not likely eliminate the entire population.